

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 CAPE TOWN 0432

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINT SF
SUBJ: BLACK ATTITUDES: MILITANT YOUTH

1. SUMMARY: THE STUDENT RIOTS OF 1976, ALTHOUGH LARGELY
CONFINED TO MAJOR URBAN AREAS IN THE TRANSVAAL AND CAPE
PROVINCES, HAVE HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON SOUTH AFRICAN
POLITICS AND IMAGE ABROAD. COMING IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE
ANGOLA CRISIS, AND AS THE SITUATIONS IN RHODESIA AND NA-
MIBIA MOVED TOWARD CRISIS POINTS, BLACK VIOLENCE IN THE
TOWNSHIPS DRAMATIZED THE VULNERABILITY OF APARTHEID AS NO
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OTHER EVENT HAS DONE SINCE THE SHARPEVILLE RIOTS IN 1960.
THE INITIAL MOMENTUM OF THE PROTEST MOVEMENT IS NOW
LARGELY SPENT. IN THE AFTERMATH, YOUNG BLACK AND BROWN
ACTIVISTS TAKE PRIDE IN WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED. THEY
TALK CONFIDENTLY ABOUT THE FUTURE BUT AT THE SAME TIME
THEY ARE CONFUSED AND UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT THEY CAN
EFFECTIVELY DO NEXT.

2. STUDENT LEADERS MAKE A SPECIAL POINT OF THE FACT THAT THEY DISCARDED THE PASSIVITY OF THEIR PARENTS AND INDEPENDENTLY CHALLENGED THE GOVERNMENT ON APARTHEID. THEY SENSE THE CONCERN THAT THEY HAVE GENERATED IN THE GOVERNMENT AND WHITE COMMUNITY AND THE HARM THAT HAS BEEN INFLICTED ON SOUTH AFRICA'S IMAGE ABROAD. THE MILITANT NATIONALISM OF BLACK AFRICA, TO WHICH THEY RELATE AS THE ONLY MOVEMENT THAT CAN PROVIDE EFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE, NO LONGER SEEMS AS REMOTE AS IT APPEARED A YEAR AGO. THEY TAKE COURAGE THAT IN ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE THE MOVEMENT HAS REACHED THE SOUTH AFRICAN FRONTIER AND THEY REGARD EVENTUAL VICTORY OF BLACK NATIONALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA AS INEVITABLE. AT THE SAME TIME THEIR INITIAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE HARSH REALITY OF AN EFFICIENT AND DETERMINED WHITE SECURITY FORCE HAS TAUGHT THEM THAT THE STRUGGLE WILL BE PROTRACTED AND DIFFICULT.

3. AN UNEASY CALM HAS FOR THE PRESENT RETURNED TO THE TOWNSHIPS AND BLACK UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES AFFECTED BY THE VIOLENCE. CLASSES HAVE REOPENED WITH ATTENDANCE MOVING TOWARD NORMALITY. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS AN UNDERLYING TENSION CLOSE TO THE SURFACE THAT COULD BE TRIGGERED BY A VARIETY OF DEVELOPMENTS.

4. THE YOUNG BLACK PROTEST MOVEMENT DEVELOPED NO SPECIFIC PROGRAM OR ORGANIZATION. IT HAS BEEN SPONTANEOUS AND EMOTIVE RATHER THAN PLANNED AND DIRECTED. THE NUMBER OF ACTIVISTS WAS RELATIVELY SMALL
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BUT THEY WERE ABLE TO TAP THE GRIEVANCES AND FRUSTRATIONS OF HUNDREDS OF THEIR PEERS. STUDENT BLACK POWER AS UNVEILED AT SOWETO IS NEW AND STILL TENTATIVE. IT IS UNCERTAIN HOW AND WHEN IT WILL BE USED ON A LARGE SCALE AGAIN. THE MILITANTS EXPECT TO LEAD NEW ASSAULTS ON THE SYSTEM. THEY WILL FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT AS THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS SECURITY FORCES CONTINUE TO PENETRATE THEIR RANKS AND MOVE AGAINST THE LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

5. IF 1976 TURNS OUT TO HAVE BEEN A DOMESTIC POLITICAL WATERSHED YEAR FOR SOUTH AFRICA, IT WILL BE IN LARGE PART BECAUSE MANY BLACK TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY COUNTERPARTS SO DRAMATICALLY PROTESTED CONTINUED BLACK SUBMISSION TO THE APARTHEID SYSTEM. THE BLACK STUDENT RIOTING, WHICH BEGAN IN SOWETO TOWNSHIP IN JUNE AND SPREAD TO SEVERAL OTHER URBAN CENTERS, INCLUDING COLORED TOWNSHIPS IN CAPE AREA AND FOR A TIME INVOLVING SOME INDIAN YOUTH, AROUSED BLACKS TO A NEW AWARENESS THAT THEIR SITUATION IS NOT IMMUTABLE AND

INJECTED A NEW VITALITY AMONG THE MORE ACTIVIST
ELEMENTS. THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE--ESPECIALLY POLICE
EXCESSES--HAS HAD A RADICALIZING EFFECT ON A MOUNTING
NUMBER OF BLACK STUDENTS AND ON SOME OF THEIR HERETOFORE
MODERATE ELDERS. WHITES WITH NO DIRECT CONTACT WITH
BLACKS--AND VERY FEW DO--HAVE LITTLE APPRECIATION OF
THE DEPTH OF THIS FEELING.

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6. THE STUDENTS WHO SPARKED THE VIOLENCE WERE RELATIVELY
FEW IN NUMBER. OF THE SCHOOL POPULATION OF 278,000 IN
SOWETO WHEN THE TROUBLE ERUPTED, 35,000 WERE HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS RANGING IN AGE FROM 16 TO 20. IN OTHER AFFECTED
TOWNSHIPS AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES THE NUMBERS WERE
PROPORTIONATELY SIMILAR. THE FACT THAT EXTRANEIOUS
ACTIVISTS ENTERED THE SCENE AS THE PROTESTS PROGRESSED
DOES NOT DETRACT FROM THE FACT THAT THE MOVEMENT WAS
STARTED AND SUSTAINED BY STUDENTS IN REBELLION AGAINST

A DEHUMANIZING SYSTEM.

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7. THE 1976 OUTBREAKS EXPOSED BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE YOUTH OF THE TOWNSHIPS AND THEIR PARENTS. MANY OF THE LATTER HAD COME TO THE URBAN AREAS FROM THE COUNTRY-SIDE AND VILLAGES WITH ALREADY ESTABLISHED HABITS AND TRADITIONS. THEY CAME FOR JOBS AND TO BETTER THEIR MATERIAL CONDITION. OTHERS WERE BORN IN THE TOWNSHIPS AND HAD LONG SINCE TOLERATED THE INSTITUTIONALIZED DISCRIMINATION THEY FOUND THERE RATHER THAN JEOPARDIZE WHAT LITTLE MATERIAL WELLBEING AND SECURITY THEY AND THEIR FAMILIES HAD GAINED. THEIR OFFSPRING, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE THE CHILDREN OF APARTHEID, THE FIRST GENERATION TO BE PRODUCED BY THE BANTU EDUCATION SYSTEM. THE OLDER TRADITIONS TEND TO HAVE LIMITED IF ANY VALIDITY FOR THEM. THEY ARE GENERALLY UNENCUMBERED BY FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES, JOBS OR PROPERTY AND THEREFORE HAVE LESS OF A SENSE OF SOMETHING TO LOSE. LIVING IN BLACK TOWNSHIPS SINCE BIRTH, THEY HAVE HAD LITTLE EXPERIENCE WITH THE WAYS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE, AND ONLY LIMITED CONTACT WITH WHITES. UNTIL MID-1976 THEY HAD NOT HAD THE SAME EXPERIENCE OF THE OLDER GENERATION WITH POLICE REPRESSION. IN SUM, THE TOWNSHIP YOUTH DID NOT SHARE THE RESIGNATION AND CAUTION OF THEIR PARENTS.

8. THE FACT THAT THEY TRIED TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE AND HAVE FALLEN FAR SHORT OF THEIR OBJECTIVES, IN PART BECAUSE THE OLDER GENERATION DID NOT SUPPORT THEM, HAS NOT EMBITTERED THE MILITANTS AS ONE MIGHT SUPPOSE. THEY TAKE PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT THEY BROKE THROUGH THE AURA OF RESIGNATION THAT CHARACTERIZES THEIR PARENTS AND DID THEIR THING. THEY DO NOT REGARD THE PRICE PAID IN TERMS OF DEAD AND INJURED AND DAMAGE TO THEIR OWN FACILITIES WITHIN THE TOWNSHIPS AS TOO HIGH A PRICE. WITH REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL THEY ACCEPT THE FACT THAT A PRICE HAS TO BE PAID TO BREAK THE SYSTEM. THIS IS NOT ENTIRELY THE BRAVADO OF THOSE WHO HAVE SURVIVED, BUT RATHER THE PRODUCT OF AN IDENTIFICATION WITH WHAT THEY REGARD AS

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THE INEXORABLE MOVEMENT OF BLACK NATIONALISM WHICH FOR THE FIRST TIME IS SEEN AS MOVING TO WITHIN REACH OF SOUTH AFRICA.

9. THE ROUGHLY SIX MONTHS THAT THE DISTURBANCES LASTED PRODUCED NO COHERENT PLAN OF ACTION, ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OR COMMONLY RECOGNIZED LEADERSHIP. YOUTHFUL BLACK POWER REMAINS VERY MUCH AN AMORPHOUS MOVEMENT. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES DIFFERED WITH TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCE DURING THE DISTURBANCES AND OFTEN THE YOUNG ACTIVISTS SEEMED TO ACT SIMPLY TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR DETERMINATION TO CHALLENGE THE SYSTEM. THEY ULTIMATELY TENDED TO SETTLE ON THE PRIORITY GOALS OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES EQUAL TO THOSE AVAILABLE TO WHITES AND RELEASE OF ALL STUDENTS DETAINED SINCE LAST JUNE, NEITHER OF WHICH THEY HAVE OBTAINED. THE LOOSE SRC (STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL) STRUCTURE REMAINS BUT WITHOUT MUCH COHESION WITHIN ITSELF OR WITH THE MORE FORMAL SASO (SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS ORGANIZATION AND ITS HIGH SCHOOL COUNTERPART SASM (SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT MOVEMENT). (FOR MORE DETAILS ON BLACK ORGANIZATIONS SEE JOHANNESBURG 0569, AND JOHANNESBURG A-26.) GOVERNMENT ACTION HAS TAKEN A HEAVY TOLL OF STUDENT LEADERS. IN THE SOWETO AREA SOME OF THE FIRST AND SECOND ECHELON LEADERS HAVE BEEN KILLED, AND MANY OTHERS ARRESTED, OR FLED INTO EXILE. THOSE WHO ARE LEFT DO NOT IMPRESS US AS BEING PARTICULARLY CHARISMATIC OR WELL-ORGANIZED.

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10. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE, HOWEVER, TO REGARD THE STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENT AS A PASSING INCIDENT. THE CURRENT LULL IN THE PROTEST MOVEMENT WAS PROBABLY INEVITABLE. THE INACTION REFLECTS A VARIETY OF FACTORS. THE LOSS OF CAPABLE LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY TELLING. WITH THE BEST LEADERS GONE, THERE IS A NOTICEABLE CONFUSION AND INDECISION IN THE RANKS. HAVING VENTED THEIR ANGER AGAINST THE SYMBOLS OF WHITE GOVERNMENT IN THE TOWNSHIPS, THE STUDENTS FIND FEWER TARGETS LEFT CLOSE AT HAND TO ATTACK. THERE HAS BEEN A GRADUAL REALIZATION THAT DAMAGE TO SCHOOL PLANTS AND
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BOYCOTTS ARE BOTH UNAVAILING AND SELF-DEFEATING. MANY RECOGNIZE THAT BLACK YOUTH IS NOT NOW EQUIPPED OR ORGANIZED TO PRESENT A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE WHITE SOCIETY WITH ITS EXTENSIVE SECURITY APPARATUS. A TIME TO RETHINK AND REGROUP WAS NECESSARY AND SEEMS TO BE IN THE MAKING.

11. NEVERTHELESS, THE MILITANCY IS STILL THERE, IF RELATIVELY QUIESCENT. THE SENSE OF FRUSTRATION AND ANGER HAS NOT SUBSIDED. IT WOULD NOT TAKE MUCH TO TRIGGER FRESH OUTBURSTS. THE ROOT CAUSES OF LAST YEAR'S DISTURBANCES REMAIN UNCHANGED. POSSIBLE NEW FLASH POINTS HAVE CRYSTALLIZED AROUND THE TRIALS OF YOUNGSTERS ARRESTED DURING THE RIOTS, THE OUTLAWING OF SASO ON SOME BLACK UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, DENIAL OF READMITTANCE TO THOSE INSTITUTIONS OF STUDENTS SUSPECTED OF TIES WITH DISSIDENTS, AND THE MASS REMOVAL OF SQUATTERS IN THE CAPE.

12. IN THE BACKGROUND LIES THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUNG ACTIVISTS TURNING TO TERRORISM AND SABOTAGE IN WHITE AREAS. THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY A FEW ISOLATED INCIDENTS OF THIS. WHETHER STUDENTS WHO HAVE GONE INTO EXILE WILL RETURN TRAINED AND EQUIPPED TO ENGAGE IN SUCH ACTIVITIES REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE WHITE VULNERABILITY IS THERE. THAT THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTS MORE TROUBLE IS CLEARLY EVIDENT IN THE LEGISLATION PASSING THROUGH THE PARLIAMENT EXPANDING THE POLICE AND CENSORSHIP POWERS OF THE STATE. THERE SHOULD BE NO DOUBT ABOUT THE SAG'S DETERMINATION TO PUT DOWN OVERT PROTEST WHENEVER IT APPEARS OR TO BE RUTHLESS IN DEALING WITH TERRORISM. WE DOUBT THAT THE LONG HIATUS

THAT FOLLOWED SHARPEVILLE WILL BE REPEATED. INTERACTING
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS ARE SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT.
WHAT FORM THE YOUTHFUL PROTEST MOVEMENT TAKES, WHAT SUPPORT
IT IS ABLE TO GENERATE AMONG ADULT BLACKS AND WHETHER
THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE SUBDUES OR INFLAMES BLACK
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FRUSTRATIONS AND ANGER ARE ISSUES WHICH WE WILL BE WATCHING
IN THE MONTHS AHEAD.BOWDLER

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